Catholicism's Moral Code

By J. J. Murphy – a former priest.

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The word "*casuistry*" is often used in this article. It means subtle or *specious* reasoning intended to mislead. I first read the word casuistry when I learned how the Jesuits operate. That word is often after the word Jesuit as in "Jesuit casuistry."

Specious means reasoning that appears sound and good but is actually false. I added the words, "specious argument" to my vocabulary when I first was confronted with flat earth.

The main point of this article is the Jesuits caused the Catholic Church to lower its standard of morality in order to keep people in the church. No wonder crime is high in most Catholic countries. Thankfully in Northern Samar, the province in the Philippines where I live, crime is low due to law enforcement and security guards carrying not only hand guns, but rifles as well.

Emphasis in bold font are mine.

A THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING of Roman Catholicism is not possible without a grasp of the peculiar structure of its system of moral theology. **It is the key to its world wide political power**. It not only furnishes a pretext for invading every phase of social and political life, but is also the means, by which the church holds in check its millions of adherents and dominates their aims and purposes. It is a moral system that has to be ingenious. On the one hand, it must fly the colors of abstract virtue, and, on the other, **maintain for political purposes the powerful support both of those who ignore religion and those who condemn it**.

The Catholic moral system as it exists today has been fashioned by the Jesuits in the war against Protestantism for which they were founded. It has two direct aims: first, to counteract the Protestant glorification of the individual conscience by establishing a moral system that will subject consciences to the guidance and dictates of a supreme and highly centralized church authority; second, to grasp and hold the allegiance both of the masses and its corrupt political leaders without either castigating their

consciences, or giving open approval to their immoralities.

This system can be described in two words: confession and casuistry.[1] Confession is the means of dictating to consciences by, a centralized authority. Casuistry is an intricate system of hairsplitting morality out of existence.

To assure a strictly objective treatment of this study of the development and nature of the moral code of the Catholic church, the writer will not draw upon his personal experiences as a priest, but will call upon the evidence of unimpeachable authorities in the field of moral theology.

The Power Of The Confessional

Power over the human heart and the most secret of human emotions means power over the mind and will of man. This the Jesuits realize. They know too that it is in the confessional, where the soul lays bear its most intimate emotions, that control of the Catholic conscience must be obtained. Without this moral control the centralization of the church and dominance of the Vatican would be worthless.

The well known theologian and historian, Dr. William K. Rockwell of Union Theological Seminary in New York, has expressed in the *Harvard Theological Review* the all-importance of emotionalism in Catholicism and the fact that the Jesuits made capital of it. Speaking of the extreme difficulty of the Protestant to understand the terror of Catholic emotionalism, he says:[2]

“Has the thought of hell mad him shiver, and the consecrated wafer made him thrill? He who cannot realistically imagine these experiences does not know the abc’s of Catholicism, in the mastery whereof lies the deepest secret of the power of the Jesuits; for their ascendancy is rooted in their hold on the fears and aspirations of Catholic piety as directed in the confessional.”

How the confessional opens the way to utter passivity on the part of the penitent and to complete dominance on the part of the confessor is well put by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (V, 486, 11th ed.) in its article on casuistry:

“The medieval mind was only too prone to look on morality as a highly technical art… What could wayfaring men possibly do but cling to their priest with a blind and unexpressed faith? Catholicism increasingly took for granted that a man imperiled his soul by thinking for himself.”

The Jesuits rightly reasoned that the only way to get crucial control over the use of confessionals everywhere was by making the practice of the confessional into a theological science sponsored and dominated by their Order. This they accomplished, and the new ‘science’ became known as casuistry or moral theology. After creating moral theology and managing to monopolize its teaching, they likewise succeeded in the further ‘task’ of imposing it on the whole church and making it the sole guide of all priests in the hearing, of confessions. Count Paul von Hoensbroech, former Jesuit priest and distinguished German scholar, emphasizes the extent and meaning of

this Jesuit masterstroke when he writes:

"There is no domain in which Jesuitism has succeeded so completely in forcing its, domination on Catholicism as that of moral theology… **The domination of the private and public life of Catholics by means of the confessional… has been mainly brought about by the moral theologians of the Jesuit Order**. The present-day Catholic morality is penetrated throughout with Jesuit morality."

It would not have mattered particularly who controlled **the Catholic confessional**, were it not for the fact that it **not only lowered Catholic morality but was strategically used for just that purpose**. This formal **misuse of the confessional arose with the Jesuits**. A brief historical picture of just how it came about is given in the *Cambridge Modern History* (V, .81):

"But a Church, ridden by the spirit of efficiency, is likely to end in frank utilitarianism, and during the 17th century there was a continually smoldering contest between the Jesuits and divines of a less worldly school as to exactly how far utility should be allowed to go. The great fight was over the confessional. Should priests pitch their standards high or low? "The Jesuits argued that severity scared many away altogether – a contingency the more to be regretted in the case of the rich and influential. Accordingly **they began a campaign to force confessors to be lax**. The famous doctrine of probabilism – first broached about the beginning of the 17th century – made it grave sin in the priest to refuse absolution, if there were any good reason for giving it. And to determine what such 'good reason' was fell to the Jesuit Escobar and the Casuists. These writers developed a whole system of expedients for protecting the penitent from a too-zealous confessor. The kind of question he might ask is carefully defined. He must not cast about for general information as to the penitent's disposition, as would a physician… He must always lean toward the most 'benign' interpretation of the law; and for his guidance casuistry ran many an ingenious coach-and-four (A carriage pulled by four horses with one driver, it must be an idiomatic expression in this case.) through inconvenient enactments."

Emphasis on the magic power of confession and absolution grew in proportion to the increasing laxity of the penitents. If the penitent had no real sorrow or intention of reforming his life, it was only natural that the magic of absolution would come to be looked upon as the source of pardon and forgiveness. This demoralizing influence is pointed out by the *Encyclopaedia Brittannica* (V, 487) when it says:

"The less the Church could expect from its penitents, the more it was driven to trust the miraculous efficiency of sacramental grace. Once get a sinner to confession, and the whole work was done. However bad his natural disposition, the magical words of absolution would make him a new man… Human nature seldom resists the charms of a fixed standard – least of all when it is applied by a live judge in a visible court… If the priest must be satisfied with so little, why be at the trouble of offering more?"

Origin And Nature Of Casuistry

Jesuit casuistry, known today simply as Catholic moral theology, is largely

the creation of passionate Spanish Jesuits with the fire of the Inquisition still in their veins. **Their plan was to find a way that would make it easy and attractive to be and remain a Catholic**. This was very necessary in Spain where Catholicism was too corrupt to generate an Evangelical Reformation.

It was also necessary at that time to find a way out of the old system of Catholic laxity and moral corruption that prevailed up till the Reformation, and at the same time to resist the influence of the Reformation started by Martin Luther in Germany and elsewhere. The task was to find a formula of morality as equally convenient as the old one, but so subtle and intricate that its laxity would not show through. This whole strategy behind the invention of casuistry, is well explained by the *Encyclopaedia Brittanica* (V, 486), as follows:

"But the casuists were drawn, almost to a man, from Italy and Spain, the two countries least alive to the spirit of the Reformation; and most of them were Jesuits, the Order that set out to be nothing Protestantism was, and everything that Protestantism was not. Hence they were resolutely opposed to any idea of reform.
"On the other hand, they would certainly lose their hold on the laity unless some sort of change were made; for many of the Church's rules were obsolete, and others far too severe to impose on the France of Montaigne or even the Spain of Cervantes. Thus caught between two fires the casuists developed a highly ingenious method for eviscerating the substance of a rule while leaving its shadow carefully intact.
"The next step was to force the confessors to accept their lax interpretation of the law; and this was accomplished by their famous theory of probabilism, first taught in Spain about 1580. This made it a grave sin for a priest to refuse absolution, whenever there was some good reason for giving it, even when there were other and better reasons for refusing it."

This practice of "probabilism" proved very effective in allowing the confessor to forgive any or all sins, regardless of the penitent's dispositions, especially when coupled with the 'companion' principle of the Jesuits that it is allowed to permit one evil in order to prevent a greater one. Working with such principles it was never difficult for a confessor to convince himself that he had to absolve the obviously, impenitent sinner for fear the sinner would leave the confessional in anger and commit **the much greater evil of breaking with the church entirely – which in Catholic eyes is the greatest of all sins**.

A practical example of the use of this Jesuit principle of 'probabilism,' in confession may be read in the recent Catholic propaganda novel, *The World, the Flesh and Father Smith*, by Bruce Marshal, a best-seller and selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club. On pages 16 to 22, the author describes how Father Smith forgives the sins of a dying sailor in a bawdy house: "He started off to tell the priest about all the women he had known in Buenos Aires and Hong Kong and said that he had liked the women in Hong Kong best." When the priest rebuked him for talking this way on his deathbed about the tawdry Jezebels in foreign ports," the dying sailor spoke back and said "the women weren't tawdry at all, especially the ones in China, who had gold on their fingernails and wore black satin slippers with high red heels", and

that now that he came to think of it he wasn't sorry for having known all these women at all, "since they had all been so beautiful and that he would like to know them again if he got the chance."

The old sailor had only a few minutes to live, so the author describes the priest as applying the Jesuit principle of 'probabilism' in the following way:

"In despair Father Smith asked the old sailor if he was sorry for not being sorry for having known all these women, and the old sailor said that yes he was sorry for not being sorry. Whereupon Father Smith said that he thought God would understand, add he absolved the old sailor from his sins, pouring the merits of Christ's Passion over the old sailor's forgetfulness of God and those long-ago dresses that had made such lovely sounds."

The brilliant historian, John Addington Symonds, gives a keen analysis of the subtle process by which the Jesuit casuists are able in the Confessional to dissolve concrete sins and promote moral laxity, while at the same time glorifying abstract virtue in the pulpit. He explains it as clearly as any Jesuit in one of his volumes that is considered a classical reference work in all universities:[3]

"It was the Jesuit Order's aim to control the conscience by direction and confession, and especially the consciences of princes, women, and youths in high position. To do so by plain speaking and honest dealing was clearly dangerous. The world had had enough of Dominican austerity. You must certainly tell people then that indulgence in sensuality, falsehood, fraud, violence, covetousness and tyrannical oppression is unconditionally wrong. "Make no show of compromise with evil in the gross; but refine away the evil by distinctions, reservations, hypothetical conditions, until it disappears. Explain how hard it is to know whether a sin is venial or mortal, and how many chances there are against its being in any strict sense a sin at all. Do not leave people to their own blunt sense of right and wrong, but let them admire the finer edge of your scalpel, while you shed up morsels they can hardly see. A ready way may thus be opened for the satisfaction of every human desire without falling into theological sins.
"The advantages are manifest. You will be able to absolve with a clear conscience. Your penitent will abound in gratitude… and be held secure… It was thus that the Jesuit labyrinth of casuistry, with its windings, turnings, secret chambers, whispering galleries, blind alleys, escape passages, came into existence."

Present Day Casuistry

The main contest within the Catholic church between the Jesuit casuists and their opponents was fought in France, the intellectual battleground of Europe. With the aid of the French monarchs and corrupt elements in the Roman Curia, the Jesuits after many years succeeded in triumphing over their enemies and getting them condemned as "heretics." This bitter inter-church conflict is known as the "Jansenist" controversy.

For a while, the Jesuits had to hedge on some of the most extreme of their

laxist views, even after their political victory. But in the middle of the 18th century, appeared a naive and fanatical Neapolitan priest by the name of Alphonsus Liguori; who took a psychopathic interest in casuistry as an escape from his own sexual obsessions. The Jesuits encouraged him, had him made a bishop; and after his death canonized as a saint and a Doctor of the Church. In so doing they won final and absolute approval for their system of moral casuistry. From then on their system of morals was gradually incorporated into Catholic theology as Official and infallible teaching.

Present-day Jesuits try to escape from the accusations leveled against their Order in these matters by stating that all of their immoral teachings in the past have been discarded. Actually, however, the entire system is taught today substantially as it was in the 17th century. A few crude opinions, such as the open approval of regicide and certain other forms of murder, have been discarded. Also the name "casuistry" has generally been changed into "moral theology." For the rest, the system remains unchanged. Paul Bert, distinguished French intellectual and government official, in his work, *La Morale de Jesuites*, has clearly proved with chapter and verse that modern textbooks of moral theology repeat the same evil principles that were taught by the 17th century casuists.

If any/additional proof were needed, it can be found in the following statement of Dr. Adolph Harnack of the University of Berlin, world-famous for his knowledge of church history. Speaking of Jesuit casuistry he says:[4]

"But the method has continued unchanged, and it exerts today its ruinous influence on dogmatics and ethics, on the consciences, of those who receive and of those who make confession, perhaps in a worse degree than in any period."

As an illustration of present-day Jesuits casuistry, the following extract is taken from the work of the Jesuit casuist Gury, published in Paris, in the eighth edition in 1892. Gury is the leading authority on modern casuistry and his works are quoted on nearly every page of the moral theologies of Noldin, Sabetti-Barrett and other Jesuit authors used today as textbooks in American Catholic seminaries. This "case" is given in a work for seminarians to teach them how to solve moral problems. There are hundreds of such cases given in Gury's work or other similar volumes. This one is taken-from Volume I, page 183, of his *Casus Conscientiae*:

"Anna had committed adultery; she replied first of all to her husband, who was suspicious and questioned her, that she had not broken her marriage bond, the second time she replied, after she had been absolved from her sin, 'I am not guilty of such a crime; finally, the third time, because her husband pressed her still further, she flatly denied the adultery and said, 'I have not committed it,' because she understood by this such adultery as I should be obliged to reveal', or 'I have not committed adultery which is to be revealed to you.' Is Anna to be Condemned?
"Anna can be justified from falsehood in the threefold case which has been mentioned. For, in the first case, she could say that she had not broken the marriage bond, because it was still in existence. In the second case, she could say that she was innocent of adultery, since her conscience was no

longer burdened with it after confession and the receiving of absolution, because she had the moral certainty that this had been forgiven. Indeed she could make the assertion under oath, according to the general opinion of theologians, plus that of Liguori, Lessius, the Salmaticenses, and Suarez. In the third case, she could in the probable view still deny having committed adultery in the sense that she was obliged to reveal it to her husband.

Moral Degeneracy by Casuistry

Casuistry is demoralizing, not only to the layman who finds that he easily receives absolution regardless of his way of life, but also to the priest who soon learns to apply to his own conscience the methods he uses on others. The consequences become even worse when we stop to realize that in reading moral theology, in the words of Symonds, "**men vowed to celibacy probe the foulest labyrinths of sexual impurity**."

It is not surprising to find that casuistry has been denounced in the strongest terms by those who are able to read the treatises on moral theology that are written only in Latin. Catholics as well as Protestants join in the condemnation. The saintly Bishop de Palafox was one of these. So too was the great intellectual and liberal ecclesiastic, Paul Sarpi. In France Abbot de Ranee, founder of the Trappist Order, in his Letters (p. 358) says:[5]

"The morality of the Jesuits is so corrupt, their principles are so opposed to the sanctity of the Gospels… that nothing is more painful to me than to see how my name is used to give authority to opinions which I detest with my whole heart."

Johann Adam Moehler, a Catholic priest and celebrated Catholic theologian of the last century declared:[6]

"Casuistry is the atomism of Christian morality… and has had a poisonous effect on the innermost being of Christian life. Religious depth, stern and holy morality and strict Church discipline were undermined by it. And it was characteristic of the Jesuits to transform the inner being into mere externals that they also conceived of the Church primarily as a State."

Lord Acton, a Catholic and father of the Cambridge Modern History, was one of the greatest historians of the last century. Speaking of the Jesuit Order he says:[7]

"It matters not what cause we take up, provided we defend it well – that is Jesuit Probabilism. It matters not what wrong we do in a good cause – that again is the maxim that the end justifies the means, which like Probabilism, was just then in the ascendancy. It matters not whether the cause for which we sin is religion or policy – even that is paralleled by the way in which the French, Jesuit's supported Richelieu in his alliance with the Protestants in the Thirty Years' War."

The distinguished scholar. Dr. Adolph Harnack of the University of Berlin, on page 102 of the above quoted volume, excoriates casuistry. *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (III, 240) finds his words worth quoting and prefaces

them with, the remark: “The decisive terms to which an authority so great as Harnack commits himself may serve to show why casuistry has disappeared from the Protestant world and from scientific ethics.” The words of Harnack himself are as follows:

“By the aid of Probabilism the Jesuit Order understood how in particular cases to transform almost all deadly sins into venial sins. It went on giving directions on how to wallow in filth, to confound conscience, and, in the confessional, to wipe out sin with sin. The comprehensive ethical handbooks of the Jesuits are in part monstrosities of abomination and storehouses of execrable sins and filthy habits, the description and treatment of which provoke an outcry of disgust.
“The most shocking things are here dealt with in a brazen-faced way by unwedded priests… often enough with the view of representing the most disgraceful things as pardonable, and of showing the most hardened transgressors a way in which they may still always obtain the peace of the Church…
“But all the greater appears the confusing influence of the religious system of which they were servants, when it was capable of producing such licentious subtleties and such a perverse estimate of moral principles… And all this too in the name of Christ… for one of the interests lying at the base of this system of immorality, no one can deny, was to maintain and strengthen the external grasp and power of ecclesiasticism.”

It is only an understanding of Catholic casuistry that enables us to realize how it is possible for Catholics to remain in excellent standing, sacramental and social, in their church, while habitually defying ‘church laws’ laid down as binding, under penalty of eternal damnation. A case in point that applies to most adult Catholics in America is the church laws on birth control. According to church teaching, the practice of birth control is a mortal sin of a most heinous and unnatural kind. Whoever habitually practices it cannot obtain valid absolution or receive communion. That is Catholic theory before casuistry goes to work on it. Actually the figures of birth control clinics and other statistics show that nearly all Catholics practice birth control. Nonetheless they continue to receive absolution and communion regularly, enjoying excellent church standing. This is the presto-chango of Catholic morality… what is condemned in theory is lived out in practice. The church turns its head the other way and pretends not to notice it. It could reserve this ‘sin’ to the bishop, as it does marriage before a Protestant minister, making it embarrassing to confess it and difficult to obtain absolution for it. But it doesn’t. It knows that half the Catholics would leave the church if it enforced such a law, so the church nullifies its laws in practice committing one evil ‘to prevent a greater evil,’ in accordance with one of the principles of casuistry.

Conclusion

The imposition of Jesuit morality upon the whole Catholic church loses much of its meaning if it is considered as an isolated fact. It was only part of the Jesuit master plan to centralize the Catholic church and thus obtain, through domination of the Papal curia, a whip hand over church dogma and

morals, appointments, and politics. The Jesuit cavalcade is briefly described as follows in the above quoted article by Dr. Rockwell:

“Certainly the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, the Syllabus in 1864, the definition of papal infallibility and absolute sovereignty in 1870, the condemnation of Modernism in 1907, and at this very moment the codification of canon law by the centralized authority of a papal autocracy based on divine right – these are monuments to the principle for which the Jesuits have contended on their march to power.”

That was in 1912. The power of the Jesuits over the worldwide Roman Catholic church has since become so absolute and unchallengeable that it has swept away Italian dominance of the College of cardinals, knowing that it now has over every Catholic country the same dominance that in former centuries it had over Italy alone.

But of all the corruptions the Jesuits practiced in their march to power that of casuistry was the most perverted and the most disastrous. Particularly applicable to them are the words that the distinguished President of the United States and international scholar, John Adams, wrote to Thomas Jefferson in condemnation of the priesthood:[8]

“My opinion is that there would never have been an infidel, if there had never been a priest. The artificial structures they have built on the purest of all moral systems for the purpose of deriving from it pence and power, revolt those who think for themselves and who read in that system only what is really there.”

But in this question of Catholicism’s moral code, as in all other aspects of its organization and activities, we must not rush to the conclusion that it is all arranged consciously for sinister purposes. To the Jesuit policy makers of the Catholic church the control of consciences is essential to sustain and increase the church’s dominance in the world. The manner in which morals are controlled matters little to them, since it is a necessary means to the attainment of what they consider the loftiest ideal in God’s whole creation.

In the words of Harnack quoted above, this glorious ideal is to maintain and strengthen the external grasp and power of ecclesiasticism.”

1. Subtle or specious reasoning intended to mislead. – Ed.↩

2. Harvard Theological Review, July 1914, page 360. Dr. Rockwell’s distinguished career is given in Who’s Who.↩

3. Vol. VI, part 1, p. 223, entitled “Catholic Reaction.” This is the sixth volume of his monumental 7 volume, work. Renaissance in Italy.↩

4. History of Dogma by Dr. Adolph Harnack, vol. VII, page 102. English translation published by Williams and Norgate, Oxford, 1899.↩

5. An English edition of Gury’s Doctrines of the Jesuits is now available and may be had from Agora Publishing Co. at $3.00.↩

6. Dr. Moehler was professor at Tuebingen University and author of the renowned defense of Catholicism, Symbolism. The above statement is 426quoted from page 23 of Professor J. B. Leu's Beitrag sur Wuerdigung Jesuitenordens.↩

7. Letters of Lord Acton to Mary Gladstone, daughter of the Right Hon. W. E. Gladstone. page 114. Macmillan, London, 1913.↩

8. Letter of John Adams, written on August 9, 1816. Quoted from the official Congressional 'Monticello-edition' of the complete Works of Thomas Jefferson, volume XV, page 60.↩

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